PITTA

Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 19 Number 11 September 2022 (Special Issue)

SPECIAL ISSUE
GUJARAT –
PASSAGE
MIGRATION

Editor's note

Some of our members had been to Gujarat during September 18-25, 2021, for an eight-day birdwatching trip, mainly focusing on the Passage Migrant species. In this Special Issue of the Pitta, we bring you a report on that trip, along with a number of colourful photographs. We hope you will find this Special Issue interesting.

SEEKING THE SEPTEMBER SUPERHEROES

Report: Passage Migration birding, Gujarat, September 18-25, 2021

Text & Photos: Umesh Mani

European Roller

Passage Migrant birds are those species that stop somewhere along their migration path for a short while, before resuming their onward journey. Around 10 bird species are considered passage migrants in Gujarat. Since Gujarat is on our westernmost coast, and more or less on the regular migration path of many of these species, these birds find it a convenient place to make a pitstop, refuel and recharge, before moving on to their eventual wintering grounds. With reference to India, while every region may regard some birds as passage species, Gujarat is considered the best location to see a large number of passage species at one place. The window to see these birds is small – they typically halt in Gujarat for only a short while, ranging from a couple of weeks to maybe a month – so September is generally the best time.

Therefore, a visit to Gujarat during this period had been high on my list for a long time. After the pandemic, which had put paid to travel plans for most of us, things finally fell into place in September 2021, and a group of 12 of us were able to make this trip. The group comprised six of us from Hyderabad – Lawrence, Srikanth, Nandakumar, Sagarika, Vinay and I – and six other birding friends from Chennai.

Day-1: Sep 18, 2021: Nalsarovar

Barring a couple of members who decided to get there early, the rest of us reached Ahmedabad early on Sep 18, 2021. We were picked up from the airport and, after a quick breakfast *en route* – a *besan*-dominated combination of *dhokla*, *fafda*, *gathiya*, *jalebi* etc – we started off for Nalsarovar by around 9:00AM, high on energy and spirits, and on anticipation of the birds we were going to see!

The first bird we saw was also the first of the passage migrants – the European Roller. It created a flutter of excitement, and we were quick to jump out of our vehicles to see and photograph the bird. It was also quite cooperative, giving plenty of time as we manoeuvred into position from different angles. After about half an hour, during which we also sighted a few other species – Long-tailed Shrike, Rufous-fronted Prinia, a distant Delicate (formerly Graceful) Prinia, Barn Swallow, Eurasian Collared Dove – we decided to move on.

Eurasian Collared Dove

Sarus Crane

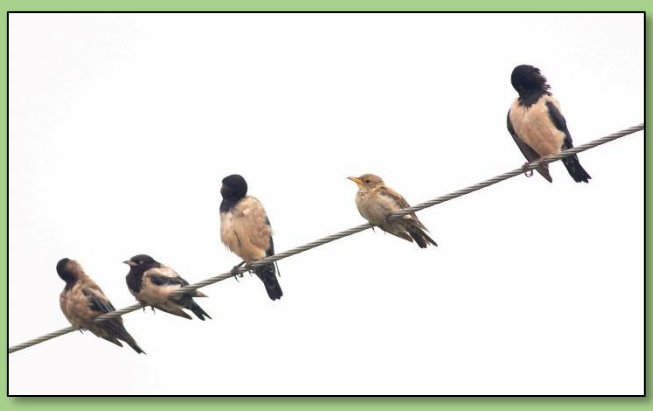
Barely a few kilometres later, the vehicles came to a screeching halt again – we had seen a pair of Sarus Cranes in a field near the road. Trooping out of the vehicles again, we spent some time taking in the visual of these beautiful birds in their preferred habitat. They were foraging, unconcerned about the people who were working the fields nearby – which says a lot about how the people here allow birds and other creatures to peacefully co-exist, thus also enabling the birds to not feel threatened when people venture nearby.

Bank Myna

Long-tailed Shrike

House Sparrow female

A suspicious Long-tailed Shrike gave us the eye, and some other commoners populated the wires above – Plain Prinia, Grey Wagtail, Green Bee-eater, House Sparrow, and a small mixed flock of Bank Mynas and Rosy Starlings, including a few juveniles.



Rosy Starling adult & juvenile

Woolly-necked Stork

By now, we were getting late for Nalsarovar, so we drove non-stop till there, met up with our guide, and drove straight to the first birding area for the day. A group of 3-4 Woolly-necked Storks welcomed us and, while we were looking at them, we had a flypast from a Eurasian Marsh Harrier and a Collared Pratincole.

Collared Pratincole

Purple Heron immature

Whiskered Tern

An immature Purple Heron was around, as was a Whiskered Tern that seemed to be exiting breeding plumage. A River Tern gave good views – a relative novelty for some of the Chennai people.

Eurasian Marsh Harrier with prey

Paddyfield Pipit

We also got to see the Harrier pick up a prey – possibly a young bird – from the irrigated field as a few Painted Storks looked on. Other commoners like Paddyfield Pipit and Crested Lark, and one of the western region endemics, the White-eared Bulbul, also showed up.

Crested Lark

White Stork

We then had a bit of a walk – around 1.5km – to reach the place where a single individual of one of our main target species was present – the White Stork. It was lovely, standing majestically atop a bund, along with a few Woolly-necked Storks, Grey Herons and Painted Storks. There was also a flock of Eurasian Spoonbills, including some in breeding plumage, assorted Egrets and a few Black-winged Stilts. A small flock of Common Teals floated on a small patch of water.

Eurasian Spoonbill

Common Teal

Pallid Harrier

A beautiful Pallid Harrier flew by, giving us an opportunity to see and photograph it, as did a Greater Spotted Eagle.

Greater Spotted Eagle, Painted Stork & Grey Heron

It was quite hot by now, though, and we started walking back towards the vehicles. We noted that even the Marsh Harrier had taken shelter in the shade under a clump of prosopis. A White-eyed Buzzard also flew over – suddenly we had been treated to a slew of raptors!

Eurasian Marsh Harrier

White-eyed Buzzard

As we drove to the next spot, a handful of Weavers in the reeds by the road turned out to be the beautiful Black-breasted Weavers.

Black-breasted Weaver

Another European Roller turned up, perched atop a twig – it was amazing how it could balance there! – and then one more, this one looking very plain. The variation in plumage between different individuals was quite vast.

We then decided to take a break. During lunch, a sudden shower had us worried for a while, but it soon stopped. The next few birds were all rain-drenched – White-eared Bulbul, Bay-backed Shrike, Rufous-fronted Prinia, Chestnut-shouldered Petronia, Siberian Stonechat, and a Grey-necked Bunting foraging in the wet grass.

White-cheeked Bulbul in the rain

A group of five Common Babblers sat on a dry clump, trying to dry themselves. Near a patch of water, we saw another Rufous-fronted Prinia with a catch – no confusion this time! – and some commoners – Red-vented Bulbul, Green Sandpiper, etc. Then, just as we were thinking of winding up for the day, given the rain and poor light, we saw some activity in a field that gave us our next passage species, and a lifer for many in the group – the Red-backed Shrike. It was a little far, though, and we hoped we would get better views in the coming days.

Red-backed Shrike

Yellow-wattled Lapwing juvenile

Spotted Owlet

Finally moving ahead, we saw a juvenile Yellow-wattled Lapwing in a field. After spending a few minutes there, we headed back towards our hotel. Nearby, we added some more birds – a pair of Spotted Owlets, Small Minivets, Shikra, Golden Oriole, and a Cuckoo in the distance that led us a merry dance before we could get a decent look at it. But it was well worth the effort, because the bird turned out to be the Eurasian (aka Common) Cuckoo!

Another passage migrant, another lifer for many of us in the group – and a great way to close the birding for the day. Three of the passage species done – what a day it had been!

We still had a long drive ahead of us, though, since we had to reach our next location at the Great Rann of Kutch tonight. So we got back to the hotel, quickly packed up, and left.

Day-2: Sep 19, 2021: Greater Rann of Kutch (GRK)

Having reached here only by 11:00PM last night, today's start was slightly later than usual. After a morning cup of tea, we started off around 7:00AM. We were initially entertained by a pair of Red-vented Bulbuls that were perched on the vehicle mirrors, checking themselves out. We gave them a few minutes before moving out.

The first sighting was an overflying Knob-billed Duck, a reminder that the early migrants had started arriving. A Spotted Flycatcher, one of the passage species, gave a fleeting glimpse before flying off. We were consoled by the guide saying that they would be around and we would surely get a better sighting soon.

We drove to a scrub forest site, parked the vehicles and walked in. About a half hour later, our guide, Bharat, found what we were looking for, and gestured to us to quickly come over. We all rushed to where he was standing, and he pointed us in the direction of a thick prosopis patch. With a lot of bending and straining, we were able to spot, deep inside the scrub, what he was showing us – a sleepy European Nightjar!

European Nightjar

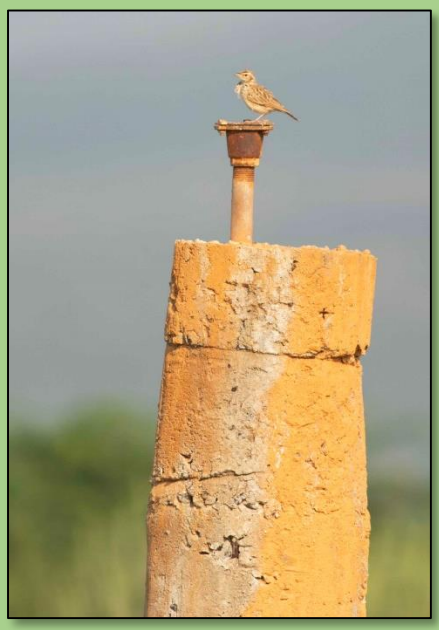
This was possibly the most difficult of the passage species to locate, and we were excited and enthused that we had got it. We spent nearly an hour there, trying to get better views from different angles, and taking photographs, but keeping our distance to avoid disturbing the dozing bird. From time to time, it would crack open one eye, check us out, then go back to sleep. We were amazed at how the guide had managed to locate the bird at all!

After a while, we decided to move to another area, where our next target bird was supposed to be seen. This was near a temple, and with ample shaded areas nearby, we decided to sit down and first finish our packed breakfast.

As we ate, we kept seeing birds flitting around in the trees, and in a Eureka moment, I realized that most temple areas offer good sightings of at least a few species. Here too, as we walked in, we first encountered a European Roller and, soon after, the bird we were looking for – the Spotted Flycatcher. Initially inside the prosopis, it flew out and perched on a mound, making it easier for us to see. A few Common Babblers were also there, moving around and creating confusion as we tried to keep track of the Flycatcher. Somewhat unusually for species named 'Common', the Babblers actually turned out to be common all along our trip route.

Common Babbler

Black-headed Bunting



Indian Bushlark

A Black-headed Bunting on a wire engaged us for a bit – it is not common towards Chennai. An Indian Bushlark perched on an old-style exhaust pipe made for an interesting picture.

Isabelline Wheatear

Then we saw the first Wheatear of the trip – an Isabelline Wheatear. A Rufous-fronted Prinia gave good views. A European Roller, with a kill that looked like a Painted Grasshopper, and a Variable Wheatear female which gave plenty of time for photographs, were interesting sightings.

Variable Wheatear female

By now it was getting hot, and we headed back to the resort for lunch and a short break before heading out again. *En route*, we saw a bedraggled Long-tailed Shrike and a Red-tailed Shrike on the wires. The lake nearby had some Eurasian Spoonbills nesting – we saw a nest with a couple of young birds clamoring for food. Unusually, the young ones seemed to be picking out food from inside the adult's mouth, rather than the adult placing the food in the young one's mouth as is normally seen! I felt this must be because the large spatulate bill of the adult may be too big to place inside the chick's mouth.

Eurasian Spoonbill feeding young

A Dalmatian Pelican, a lifer for most members in the group, took a lazy flight around the lake and was soon joined by another. At one point, they came head-on to us, giving us an idea just how massive their wingspan is!

Dalmatian Pelican

After this action we got back to the Spoonbills, only to find that the young ones were still begging. It was interesting to see that the young ones had already started developing the spatulate bills that they are named for.

Just as we were thinking of moving back, we saw a couple of Bee-eaters on a dry bush that turned out to be our passage species #5 – the Blue-cheeked Bee-eater. Unfortunately they were not very close by. We did find a couple of Green Bee-eaters though.

Striolated Bunting

A mossy rock face nearby yielded a Striolated Bunting looking for insects, and a Common Tailorbird. We saw the Bunting pick up some nesting material, and the Tailorbird also came up with a prey – a Boll Worm Moth (*Helicoverpa armigera*). Then it came closer – and we suddenly realized that it was not a Tailorbird but a Rufous-fronted Prinia – the red on the head was, well, redder – and we had been foxed by this! Just goes to show that even the most 'familiar' birds cannot be taken for granted on the field.

Rufous-fronted Prinia with Boll Worm Moth prey

The resort has several water bowls and a couple of feeders which usually attract several birds. As we waited for lunch, we saw a Variable Wheatear female hanging around near the lunch area, as also a White-eared Bulbul. An Oriental Garden Lizard and a House Sparrow were also active.

Oriental Garden Lizard

House Sparrow female

Suddenly we were informed that a snake had been spotted in the bushes near the outer periphery of the resort, and we rushed there to see it. It was a Saw-scaled Viper, which was slithering around in the cactus at first, then came down to the ground. It was a beautiful, healthy specimen, nearly 6ft long.

Saw-scaled Viper

By now, lunch was ready, so we decided to finish lunch and take a brief rest before heading out again for the evening session.

We started off around 3:30PM, and drove to Vekariya Rann area, where a vagrant pair of Marbled Ducks had been seen over the past few days. Naturally, we wanted to see them too. Initially, besides a few Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, all we saw were a Northern Shoveler – quite an early arrival, we felt – a Wood Sandpiper, a Cormorant, a couple of Common Coots, a few Terns, some Black-winged Stilts, a bunch of Little Grebes – all the usual suspects, in fact. A flock of 40-50 Black-tailed Godwits, a Spoonbill and a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater flew over, and there was a Black-headed Gull in the water.

Little Grebe

Black-headed Gull

Srikanth and the guide had been searching for the Marbled Ducks all this time. Unfortunately the water had receded a lot, and the birds in the water were really far away. Srikanth did manage to get a record shot where the Marbled Ducks could be seen, but they were so far away that we could not discern any features. It was disappointing, since this could well have been the biggest highlight of the trip. But then, this is what birding is – we don't always get what we want or how we want it.

So we reconciled to the fact that it would have to be another day, and started back for the resort.

Day-3: Sep 20, 2021: Greater Rann of Kutch (GRK)

The day started with a familiar face, the Black-winged Kite, by the road. We were driving to a site that has large swathes of scrub vegetation. As soon as we reached there, we saw a juvenile Red-backed Shrike. This was followed by a pair of Tawny Pipits foraging on the grass. We followed them for quite some time, as they meandered their way across the grass.

Tawny Pipit

Grey-necked Bunting

The grass seemed to be a popular feeding ground, because we also saw a pair of Grey-necked Buntings foraging there, besides another couple sunning themselves on the prosopis. A female Black-headed Bunting found a nice perch on a bare stick, only to be knocked off the perch by a (probable) young Red-backed Shrike. A flock of Rosy Starlings flew past, and a Common Stonechat and a Variable Wheatear hung around for a while.

Black-headed Bunting female

Common Stonechat

We were looking for our next target species, which was known to be a shy, skulking bird with the tendency to fly away at the slightest disturbance or threat perception – the Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin. After searching for quite a while in the scrub, during which interval we faithfully followed in his footsteps, our guide suddenly stopped and said, “Udhar hai.” For a few moments we could not even see it, but then a slight movement helped us locate the bird, and our cameras went into action. Quite characteristically, it gave us just a few seconds before zipping off into the bush. A couple of Baya Weavers and an Indian Bushlark distracted us, but we soon got back to looking for the Scrub Robin. We were not satisfied with the views, though, and hoped we would get it again later.

Indian Bushlark

Red-backed Shrike

Black-winged Kite

A Red-backed Shrike and a pair of Ashy-crowned Sparrow Larks were interesting, as was a hovering Black-winged Kite. Suddenly someone saw a Cuckoo on a bush a little way away, and we started off after it. It kept shifting perches as we tried to approach, but we finally managed to get a proper view – the Eurasian (aka Common) Cuckoo.

A Blue-cheeked Bee-eater landed up on a wire with what seemed like a bee catch, and gulped it down in a jiffy. A Rufous-fronted Prinia diverted us for a few minutes, as did a Plain Prinia. The Grey-necked Bunting still seemed to be around. A beautiful Booted Eagle flew past and gave us a very good view, as did a Common Rosefinch female.

Booted Eagle

Common Rosefinch female

On the way back to the resort, a washed-out looking European Roller on a wire had me puzzled as to why the plumage was so pale. We saw another individual with the usual plumage at a water puddle, though.

European Roller

Red-backed Shrike immature

An immature Red-backed Shrike was very cooperative, but the adult not so much! A Rufous-fronted Prinia tried to make up for it, sitting nearby and allowing some time for photographs. We also – finally! – got a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater up close and had it sit for a while, maybe due to the heat – it did seem to be panting for quite some time.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater

Back at the resort, we had a brief rest followed by lunch. Then, as usual, we had some time before we had to start off for evening birding.

Common Babbler with Convolvulus Hawk Moth prey

The customary Common Babblers were around as always – one came up with a moth catch. The moth was later identified as a Convolvulus Hawk Moth (*Agrius convolvuli*). The Babbler had quite a task, defending its prey from the other Common Babblers around, and finally flew off with the prey to find a safe place to consume it.

An eye-catching insect on an iron pole, which we thought was a Cicada, later turned out to be a Red-spined Tree Locust (*Anacridium rubrispinum*). A beautiful Indian Grey Mongoose kept us engaged for a while – the ease with which it walked around amidst the thorny branches was amazing.

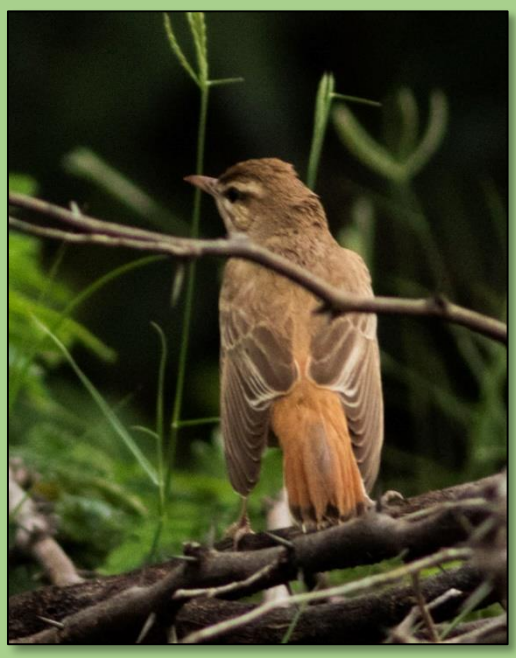
Red-spined Tree Locust

Indian Grey Mongoose

White-cheeked Bulbul

Red-wattled Lapwing juvenile

We got started and took off for an evening session. Suddenly it started raining, and we got a little worried as to whether any birding would be possible at all. Nevertheless, there were still some interesting sightings – a rain-drenched White-cheeked Bulbul, House Sparrow, Variable Wheatear, a pair of foraging Grey Francolins in a field, a juvenile Red-wattled Lapwing, and our first Bay-backed Shrike of the day.



Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin

Painted Francolin

For the last short pocket of time, we drove to a patch that had good scrub. We were immediately welcomed by good views of a Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin sitting in the open on some dry branches – possibly the rain had brought it out. The same patch also gave us a pair of Painted Sandgrouse hanging around in the wet grass, Sykes's Warbler, Grey-necked Bunting, Rufous-fronted Prinia, and an unexpected bonus, a small mixed flock of Small and White-bellied Minivets, unfortunately too far and in poor light to photograph well.

Sykes's Warbler

Small Minivet & White-bellied Minivet

That brought the day to a close, and we headed back for dinner and a well-earned rest.

Day-4: Sep 21, 2021: Greater Rann of Kutch (GRK)

Black Francolin

The day started with a bang – near the lake, the first bird we heard, and then saw, was a Black Francolin on a bund. Next came an early arrival, the Red-tailed (aka Persian) Wheatear – quite a bonus, as this bird is not easy to get. A Grey Francolin also put in an appearance, as did some usual suspects – Common Babbler, European Roller, Variable Wheatear, House Sparrow, White-eared Bulbul, Chestnut-shouldered Petronia, Red-backed Shrike etc. A Lesser Whitethroat gave good views.

Lesser Whitethroat

Spotted Flycatcher

A Paddyfield Pipit on the grass drew our attention to a Grey-necked Bunting that was perched quite near us!

A Marsh Harrier flew over, and a Spotted Flycatcher perched on some dry twigs gave excellent views – it gave plenty of time as it sunned itself, and those of us who had missed it yesterday were able to see it to their full satisfaction. I don't think I have ever seen another Flycatcher so cooperative!

It was quite hot by now, and we started driving back towards the resort for a break. *En route* were some commoners – Laughing Dove, Red-vented Bulbul, Red-wattled Lapwing, Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark and a beautiful Common Sandpiper. Near the lake, the Red-tailed Wheatear was still around, and we got to see some interesting views as it hopped around on the rocks.

Red-tailed Wheatear

A preening Red-vented Bulbul made for some interesting photos.

Red-vented Bulbul

We now reached the resort, had lunch and a couple of hours' break. After lunch, since we had by now already got all the main target birds – the passage species – we decided to try our luck with the Marbled Ducks one more time. We felt that although it was a long drive, the species would be well worth the effort.

Accordingly, we drove to Vekariya Rann and started searching for the Marbled Ducks. The water had receded a fair bit, and was now standing in small pools everywhere around the grassy area, so we had to scan every bit to see if we could locate the birds. It was frustrating, because every duck would raise our hopes and, once identified as something else, would bring them crashing down once again!

We located Spot-billed Ducks, Northern Pintails, Common Teals, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe – but no Marbled Ducks. We were naturally quite disappointed, but then, there was nothing to be done about it.

Eurasian Marsh Harrier

A beautiful Eurasian Marsh Harrier quartered the ground, looking for prey. It flew quite close to us, and we got some excellent views. But it was poor consolation for missing out on a major duck species.

Anyway, after scanning the waters repeatedly for more than an hour, we decided to wind up and get back to the resort. Tomorrow would be an important day, as it was to be our last day at GRK.

Day-5: Sep 22, 2021: Greater Rann of Kutch (GRK)

Starting early, we headed to Banni Grasslands to look for birds that we had not seen so far on the trip. The first sighting was a Eurasian Cuckoo, which we had seen earlier, but since it was early morning, the bird was preening and warming up, and we were able to get a good look at it.

We saw a Booted Eagle inside a tree, and a fresh-looking European Roller up close. A Red-backed Shrike gave beautiful views.

Red-backed Shrike

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse

We entered Banni and immediately came upon a foraging Crested Lark. In the same area, we found a pair of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse and a small flock of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters. They were perched on a patch of damp ground and some dry twigs, and these were easily the best views we had got of this species!

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater

First winter Red-tailed Shrike

A first-winter Red-tailed Shrike perched on a prosopis was quickly followed by an adult. A Montagu's Harrier took off from its perch the moment we laid eyes on it. The prosopis seemed to be a favoured perch – we also found another handsome European Roller.

Montagu's Harrier

A small flock of Collared Pratincole engaged us for quite some time. They were hanging around near a small puddle of water, and did not seem too concerned by our presence, so we were able to watch and photograph them for quite some time.

Collared Pratincole

Red-tailed Shrike adult

Driving on, we saw another Red-tailed Shrike and then an addition to the list, a Great Grey Shrike. A Marsh Harrier flew past, and a beautiful Crested Lark gave nice views. Then came a Desert Wheatear – after a long time!

Desert Wheatear female

Crested Lark

The Crested Lark seemed to have actually lain down and gone to sleep – it was flat on the ground, neck extended along the sand, and with eyes closed, for nearly 6-7 seconds – which was so unusual. After a few seconds it opened its eyes, shook itself, got up and had a dust bath! It indulged in at least 5-6 rounds of dust bathing, as we watched, engrossed.

A few Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters were also around. We saw one with a catch of what seemed to be an ant – we watched it manoeuvre the ant into position before swallowing it whole.

Eurasian Cuckoo

We took a break for a field breakfast before moving ahead. The first sighting was a Eurasian Cuckoo on an electric wire – and it stayed put there for quite some time, allowing us to approach fairly close.

Common Kestrel

Great Grey Shrike

A Common Kestrel flew past in leisurely fashion, and a Rufous-tailed Lark made an appearance. A Great Grey Shrike, perched on some dry branches, was very obliging until it was displaced by a Spotted Flycatcher. A Red-rumped Swallow and Siberian Stonechat also gave very good views.

Red-rumped Swallow

Siberian Stonechat

We got to see the Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin again – it seemed to be as curious about us as we were about it, and sat around looking at us for quite some time.

Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin

With that, our morning session came to an end, and we returned to the resort for lunch and a rest. In the evening, some members of the team were to go on to Jamnagar, while the rest were to return to Ahmedabad and thence to Hyderabad.

As we were waiting for a cup of tea before starting to Jamnagar, our eye was caught by some action in the scrub behind the resort dining area. We realized that a pair of Spotted Flycatchers – a species we had spent considerable time looking for earlier – had actually landed up at the resort itself! We spent some time watching them as they went about trying to catch insects.

Yellow-eyed Babbler

We were diverted by another bird moving around in the bushes. There was a lot of excitement when we realized that it was the lovely Yellow-eyed Babbler. As is its wont, though, it kept scuttling around inside the bush, and it was not easy to get a good look at it.

It suddenly started drizzling, and we thought that would be the end of the bird activity. Strangely, however, the Yellow-eyed Babbler decided to come out and perch on an open branch, perhaps to enjoy the rain.

The drizzle stopped soon enough, and some other birds came out to dry and preen themselves – Red-vented Bulbul, House Sparrow – and a very judgemental-looking White-eared Bulbul!

White-eared Bulbul

It was getting late now, and we started off to Jamnagar, bidding goodbye to our friends who were returning to Hyderabad, and to the resort staff, who had taken such good care of us over the past few days.

Ruff juvenile

However, although we were supposed to get a move on, we could not restrain ourselves from birding on the way – after all, when birds are there, how can a birder not look at them? We saw a few mostly common species – Red-wattled Lapwing, Black-winged Stilt and what turned out to be a juvenile Ruff.

As it was getting dark, we settled down for the long drive and, finishing dinner on the way, reached Jamnagar and checked into the hotel late that night.

Day-6: Sep 23, 2021: Balachhadi, Bedi Bundar & Lakhota Lake, Jamnagar

The plan for the day was to start our birding at Balachhadi beach, then move on to the other locations. Although a smaller group now, we were all quite excited at the prospect of finding some new waterbirds. It was an overcast, somewhat drizzly day, so we crossed our fingers and got started.

Heuglin's Gull

At the spot we parked, there were a few bedraggled-looking Laughing Doves on the wires, and some warbler activity in the trees nearby, but we could not see it properly. Moving ahead, we were greeted by a Heuglin's Gull and a pair of Common Redshanks in flight. Three Pied Avocets flew past – there is something about their upturned bills that tends to immediately perk up your spirits!

Lesser Sand Plover

It had been low tide since the past few hours, and the water had receded so much that the mudflats extended for more than 100m – meaning we had to wade through a lot of the slush to get anywhere within viewing distance of the birds. It was tiring, and the rainy weather added to the gloom, but the thought of possibly getting some new birds kept us going.

A Eurasian Curlew strolled along the edge of the water, and stray individuals of several other species were also seen – Whiskered Tern, Painted Stork, Little Ringed Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Western Reef Egret, Black-winged Stilt, Little Stint, Terek Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Grey Heron. A Dunlin and a Curlew Sandpiper were seen in the distance.

Curlew Sandpiper

Suddenly a flock of around 25 Lesser Whistling-ducks flew past, giving a trailer of bigger flocks we could expect to see. There was a little excitement as a small group of seven Greater Flamingos flew over, graceful as ever. A white morph Western Reef Egret strode around purposefully, and it was interesting watching it trying to catch small fish in the mudflats. I felt like cheering when it finally caught a fish after numerous efforts!

Western Reef Egret white morph

By now, the group had got scattered around, each member watching or following whichever bird caught their fancy. I moved to another patch of mudflats closer to the shore, where there seemed to be some action. A Eurasian Curlew flew past with its characteristic whistling in-flight calls. I finally found a flock of Godwits, which included both Black-tailed and Bar-tailed.

It was at a fair distance, so I did even not realise at the time – it was only when going through the photographs at the time of writing this report that I noticed that one of the Bar-tailed Godwits had leg rings on both legs! And fortunately, in one later flight photograph, the ring was clear. I have now sent the details to the BNHS banding team, and am awaiting some details regarding the bird's migration path. It just goes to show the value that photographs add to birding – even after a year, we are in a position to find some information about the migration of this particular Godwit.

Bar-tailed Godwit with leg rings

I saw a group of around 15 Eurasian Curlews hanging around in the water. There were a single Slender-billed Gull on the far side, too far to even see properly. A Grey Heron was busily preening.

Eurasian Curlew

Grey Heron

Large group of Eurasian Oystercatchers

Then came the next surprise. I saw a Eurasian Oystercatcher standing in the water, but it took off almost immediately, and landed a little way off. As I tracked its flight and landing, I was thrilled to see that there was a large group of Oystercatchers there. I managed to get 22 (!) birds in one frame - that has to be one of the highlights of the trip for me – a fabulous sight!

The Curlews took off and landed again almost in the same spot, giving some nice flight action. Wonder what makes them do this – possibly just to warm up, I surmised. I suddenly noticed a couple of preening birds that looked different. On checking, these turned out to be Great Knots! When they moved along a little later, I realized that there were more Knots there – a total of around 15 birds – along with some Bar-tailed Godwits.

Great Knot

Western Reef Egret

A lovely Western Reef Egret graced the shores, and there was also a Black-tailed Godwit in breeding plumage, beautiful though a little far away.

Dunlin

Moving ahead, I saw a small group of about 6-7 Dunlins hanging around with some Sand Plovers and Turnstones. Interestingly, most of them were still in partial breeding plumage, with the trademark black belly. After about half an hour, the flock took off, and I started moving back towards the shore, which the other members are also heading towards.

Eurasian Curlew

We came upon a beautiful Eurasian Curlew, another Dunlin – this time a non-breeding individual – and a Common Redshank. A Baya Weaver was busily building his nest on a nearby palm tree, and we stopped to watch for a while – this sight never fails to engross!

Caspian, Lesser Crested, Gull-billed & Little Terns

Grey Plover

A mixed flock of Terns was resting on the ground – Caspian, Lesser Crested, Gull-billed and Little Terns. There was also a lone Grey (aka Black-bellied) Plover nearby, in full breeding plumage.

Little Stint

At another small pool of water, along with a few Little and Temminck's Stints, we saw another Dunlin – and this one was ringed! Again, I did not notice the leg ring at the time; it can be difficult while reviewing photos in the camera LCD panel in the sunlight, so I realised this only later when going through the photographs. The bird had a metal ring on one leg, and two plastic flags on the other.

Dunlin with leg ring and flags

It is so exciting to see ringed birds, because it triggers us to think about which parts of the world it may have been to! In this case, later enquiry with BNHS revealed that this adult bird had been ringed in the Sachana area near Ahmedabad on January 7, 2020, and was reported once in April 2021 – so our report was the first of this migratory season. It also showed that the bird showed pretty good site fidelity – Jamnagar is only about 275km away from where it was ringed.

By now it was quite late, and we decided to break for lunch. While moving back to shore, we saw an Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark hopping around beside the track. We saw a mixed flock of what seemed to be the earlier Oystercatchers with a handful of Gulls and Terns – strangely, they were all facing exactly away from us!

Black-tailed Godwit

After lunch and an hour's rest, we were ready for a short evening session. We started with a couple of Northern Shovelers in eclipse plumage, interspersed with a few Black-tailed Godwits.

Red-wattled Lapwing

Just as we were getting warmed up, though, it started raining. We did see a Red-wattled Lapwing, and a bunch of House Sparrows looking miserable in the rain.

House Sparrow flock

Since we still had some time, we decided to move to another area where we hoped that there would be no rain. It was quite overcast, though – and through the gloom, we saw a few Lesser Flamingos and a few assorted waders – Little Stint, Dunlin, Ruff etc.

Ruff

Spot-billed Duck

Whiskered Tern in partial breeding plumage

At another spot nearby, a couple of Spot-billed Ducks and a few Common Coot were also seen, along with a Red-wattled Lapwing, a River Tern, a few Caspian Terns, a couple of Whiskered Terns still showing some of their breeding plumage – and a Knob-billed Duck!

Knob-billed Duck

By now, it was getting darker, so we decided to wind up for the day.

Day-7: Sep 24, 2021: Charkhala & Dhinchada, Jamnagar

Charkhala, where we were to start our birding today, is a little over 100km from Jamnagar. We reached the beach by around 9:00AM and started birding. The very first sighting was a Dalmatian Pelican, lazily treading water near the edge, along with a Grey Heron and a Great Egret. A few Ruddy Turnstones in non-breeding plumage foraged in the foreground, and a Common Sandpiper ambled past.

Ruddy Turnstone in non-breeding plumage

Osprey

Little Cormorant

It was very overcast and gloomy, but there were still some birds around. We spotted an Osprey sitting on a lamppost, but it took off soon after. Some other commoners were seen – Little and Indian Cormorant, Greater Flamingo, Grey Heron, River and Whiskered Terns.

Greater Flamingo

Wire-tailed Swallow

A beautiful Wire-tailed Swallow in fresh plumage sat patiently on a roadside rock and allowed us to take a few photos, then flew on to an electric post. We saw a very dark-looking Western Reef Egret, and a few non-breeding Little Grebes swimming around in the rain. A beautiful Pied Kingfisher also hung around on a rock.

Little Grebe

Pied Kingfisher

As the rain showed no signs of letting up, we then decided to try another area. *En route*, we saw a few River Terns in flight, and a small flock of Terns on a sandbar that were identified as Saunders's Terns at the time – causing much excitement – but later turned out to be Whiskered Terns – so poor was the light! A Grey Heron fished on the shore.

Grey Heron with catch

White-eyed Buzzard

After a break for tea, during which we also hoped that the rain would let up, we got started. A few minutes later, we saw a lovely White-eyed Buzzard preening on a post. A Coppersmith Barbet, the first of the trip, also sat nearby. A little way down the road, we saw a White-throated Kingfisher with a lizard kill.

Coppersmith Barbet

White-throated Kingfisher

We took a break for lunch, and a short rest, before moving to the next spot, Dhinchada. This is known as a place that usually gives good sightings, and we hoped to find some interesting species there. The first sighting was a Pied Avocet that was actively foraging in the shallow waters, walking around while swiveling its bill in trademark scything fashion. It seemed to be an immature bird. We spent almost 15 minutes watching and photographing the Avocet.

Pied Avocet

Black-winged Stilt adult & immature

There were also a few Black-winged Stilts there, including some immature birds, and a Western Reef Egret.

Greater Flamingo adult & immature

Another marshy spot nearby rewarded us with some fairly close sightings of a mixed flock of around 30 Lesser and Greater Flamingos, including several immatures.

Lesser Flamingo & Painted Stork

Ruff having a bath

A small group of Painted Storks foraged a little further away. A few Ruffs were active in the water, feeding, bathing and chasing each other around, and making for some very interesting birding!

Barn Swallow

A flock of around 25 Lesser Whistling-ducks flew over. Other birds at this spot included Whiskered Tern, Common Redshank, Red-wattled Lapwing, Black-winged Stilt, Wood Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, River Tern, Western Reef Egret, Little Stint etc. A small group of Barn Swallows, including some juveniles, were perched on a wire. A few Lesser Sand Plovers were foraging, and a Eurasian Curlew and a Black-headed Ibis strolled across. A few Black-tailed Godwits hid among knee-high grass, which I found quite unusual.

Black-headed Ibis

Black-tailed Godwit

We then moved to a nearby area that had some salt pans – and struck the jackpot almost immediately – we saw a small group of 5-6 Red-necked Phalaropes leisurely swimming around, along with a Marsh Sandpiper that insisted on sticking with them.

Red-necked Phalarope

A Black-necked Stork flew across in the distance, too far to photograph. It was fun watching the Whiskered Terns fishing, and trying to catch the moment. After innumerable tries, I managed to get a couple of decent captures.

Whiskered Tern with catch

A Common Sandpiper, Lesser Sand Plover and a Great Egret were all looking for their last meal before retiring for the day.

Pacific Golden Plover

Just as we were thinking about closing for the day, we came across a Pacific Golden Plover across the water, a Common Redshank, a few Dunlins (with a Great Knot and a Little Stint) in flight and, a bit of a misfit at the salt pans, an Indian Silverbill. And a Pied Avocet came to say good night!

Day-8: Sep 25, 2021: Dhinchada, Jamnagar

Today was our last day, and we had only a few hours available for a morning session, so we made an early start. We decided to go back to Dhinchada since that was the nearest location and offered the possibility of sighting some birds that we had not seen so far.

The day's tally started with a Paddyfield Pipit and a female Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark. We were watching a foraging Western Yellow Wagtail, probably a first-winter individual of the *thunbergi* subspecies, when our attention was caught by a very white-looking bird with a patchy head – it turned out to be a moulting Ruff. Then we found another individual which was also at a different stage of moulting!

Ruff moulting

Marsh Sandpiper

A Marsh Sandpiper also foraged at the edge of the water. Our guide called us to point out a small bird silently swimming around – the Great Crested Grebe. The whole scene was so serene!

Greater Flamingo

Several Little Grebes, also in breeding plumage, floated around along with some Common Coots. A Whiskered Tern surveyed the scene from above. A pair of the resident Spot-billed Ducks were seen, as was a flock of Greater Flamingos flying past. A dark-morph Western Reef Egret flew over us before settling down nearby.

Western Reef Egret dark morph

Black-winged Stilt

A lovely Black-winged Stilt, which I feel is one of our most beautiful yet most ignored birds, sedately walked past. A small colony of Gulls on a far-away sandbar engaged us for a while as we tried to identify them – the flock included Slender-billed, Brown-headed and Black-headed Gulls. An Osprey turned up and created a flutter.

Another Yellow Wagtail – this time it seemed to be an adult *thunbergi* – caught our attention, before we were distracted by a pair of Common Sandpipers chasing each other around. Yet another Yellow Wagtail had a curious blackish necklace-like demarcation and a faint dark wash on its chest.

Yellow Wagtail with chest markings

Then came the best part of the morning – we saw a pair of Great Crested Grebes engaging in their famous courtship ritual, bowing and bobbing around, raising their heads to the skies, and puffing out their crest and neck feathers!

Great Crested Grebe pair courtship ritual

It would have been great to capture the sequence on video, but I was too enthralled – and too scared to take my eyes off for even a moment to switch to video mode, for fear of missing any of that spectacular display.

Curlew Sandpiper

Eurasian Spoonbill adult (L) & juvenile (R)

We saw a couple of Curlew Sandpipers in the water. A few Little Stints, Lesser Sand Plovers, Great Egrets, Black-tailed Godwits, Painted Storks, Northern Shovelers and a few Eurasian Spoonbills (including juveniles) were also around. There were several Dunlins and Broad-billed Sandpipers in a mixed flock, along with the Sand Plovers and Little Stints.

Broad-billed Sandpiper (extreme left), Dunlin, Lesser Sand Plover, Little Stint

A few Greater Flamingos gave some photo opportunities as they walked around, foraging. A couple of immatures were also seen.

Western Reef Egret & Little Cormorant

A small group of Little Cormorants seemed to be school-fishing at the edge of one of the salt pans – and some Eurasian Spoonbills and several Western Reef Egrets seemed to be opportunistically feeding alongside, leapfrogging over each other as they chased the fleeing fish!

We had seen some great action today, but it was now approaching 9:00AM, and it was time to start for Ahmedabad, from where we were to catch our return flights. With heavy hearts we decided to wind up and get moving – of course, with the hope and confidence that we would surely bird there again another day!

The full list of birds seen during the trip is given below:

Sl No	Species	Location		
		Nalsarovar	Great Rann of Kutch	Jamnagar
1	Ashy Prinia	Y		
2	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	Y	Y	Y
3	Asian Koel	Y	Y	Y
4	Asian Openbill	Y		Y
5	Asian Palm Swift		Y	
6	Asian Pied Starling	Y		
7	Bank Myna	Y		
8	Barn Swallow	Y	Y	Y
9	Barred Buttonquail		Y	
10	Bar-tailed Godwit		Y	Y
11	Baya Weaver	Y	Y	Y
12	Bay-backed Shrike	Y	Y	
13	Black Drongo	Y	Y	Y
14	Black Francolin		Y	
15	Black Kite	Y		Y
16	Black-bellied Plover (Grey Plover)			Y
17	Black-bellied Plover/Golden Plover sp.			Y
18	Black-breasted Weaver (Bengal Weaver)	Y		
19	Black-headed Bunting		Y	
20	Black-headed Gull		Y	
21	Black-headed Ibis	Y		Y
22	Black-necked Stork			Y
23	Black-tailed Godwit		Y	Y
24	Black-winged Kite	Y	Y	Y
25	Black-winged Stilt	Y	Y	Y
26	Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	Y	Y	
27	Bonelli's Eagle		Y	
28	Booted Eagle		Y	
29	Booted Warbler		Y	
30	Brown Rock Chat		Y	
31	Brown-headed Gull		Y	
32	Caspian Tern			Y
33	Cattle Egret		Y	Y
34	Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse		Y	
35	Citrine Wagtail	Y	Y	
36	Collared Pratincole	Y	Y	
37	Common Babbler	Y	Y	Y
38	Common Buzzard		Y	
39	Common Cuckoo	Y	Y	
40	Common Greenshank	Y	Y	Y
41	Common Iora	Y		
42	Common Kingfisher	Y		
43	Common Myna	Y	Y	Y
44	Common Pochard		Y	
45	Common Quail		Y	
46	Common Redshank	Y	Y	Y
47	Common Sandpiper		Y	Y
48	Common Tailorbird	Y	Y	
49	Common/Jungle Myna	Y		
50	Coppersmith Barbet	Y		Y

Sl No	Species	Location		
		Nalsarovar	Great Rann of Kutch	Jamnagar
51	Cormorant sp.			Y
52	Crab-Plover			Y
53	Crested Lark	Y	Y	Y
54	Curlew Sandpiper			Y
55	Dalmatian Pelican		Y	Y
56	Delicate Prinia (Indian Graceful Prinia)	Y		
57	Dunlin			Y
58	Dusky Crag Martin	Y	Y	
59	Eared Grebe (Black-necked Grebe)			Y
60	Eurasian Collared-Dove	Y	Y	Y
61	Eurasian Coot	Y	Y	Y
62	Eurasian Curlew			Y
63	Eurasian Hoopoe	Y	Y	Y
64	Eurasian Kestrel (Common Kestrel)		Y	
65	Eurasian Marsh-Harrier	Y	Y	
66	Eurasian Moorhen	Y		Y
67	Eurasian Nightjar (European Nightjar)		Y	
68	Eurasian Oystercatcher			Y
69	Eurasian Spoonbill	Y	Y	Y
70	Eurasian Wryneck		Y	
71	European Roller	Y	Y	Y
72	Glossy Ibis	Y	Y	Y
73	Great Cormorant			Y
74	Great Crested Grebe		Y	Y
75	Great Egret	Y	Y	Y
76	Great Grey Shrike		Y	
77	Great Thick-knee			Y
78	Great/Intermediate Egret			Y
79	Greater Coucal	Y	Y	Y
80	Greater Flamingo		Y	Y
81	Greater Painted-Snipe	Y		
82	Greater Sand Plover			Y
83	Greater Short-toed Lark		Y	
84	Greater Spotted Eagle		Y	
85	Greater Whitethroat (Common Whitethroat)		Y	
86	Greater/Mongolian (Sykes's) Short-toed Lark	Y		
87	Green Bee-eater	Y	Y	Y
88	Green Sandpiper	Y	Y	Y
89	Green-winged Teal (Common Teal)	Y	Y	
90	Grey Francolin	Y	Y	Y
91	Grey Heron	Y	Y	Y
92	Grey Wagtail	Y	Y	
93	Grey-breasted Prinia	Y	Y	
94	Grey-necked Bunting	Y	Y	
95	Gull-billed Tern	Y	Y	Y
96	House Crow	Y	Y	Y
97	House Sparrow	Y	Y	Y
98	Indian Bushlark (Red-winged Bushlark)		Y	
99	Indian Cormorant			Y
100	Indian Courser	Y		

Sl No	Species	Location		
		Nalsarovar	Great Rann of Kutch	Jamnagar
101	Indian Golden Oriole	Y		
102	Indian Nightjar	Y	Y	
103	Indian Peafowl	Y	Y	Y
104	Indian Pond Heron	Y	Y	Y
105	Indian Robin	Y	Y	Y
106	Indian Roller	Y	Y	
107	Indian Silverbill	Y	Y	Y
108	Indian Skimmer			Y
109	Indian Spot-billed Duck		Y	Y
110	Indian/Greater Spotted Eagle	Y		
111	Isabelline Shrike		Y	Y
112	Isabelline Wheatear		Y	
113	Jungle Prinia		Y	
114	Kentish Plover			Y
115	Knob-billed Duck (Comb Duck)		Y	Y
116	Large Grey Babbler	Y		
117	Laughing Dove	Y	Y	Y
118	Lesser Crested Tern			Y
119	Lesser Flamingo			Y
120	Lesser Sand Plover			Y
121	Lesser Whistling-duck		Y	Y
122	Lesser Whitethroat		Y	
123	Little Cormorant	Y	Y	Y
124	Little Grebe	Y	Y	Y
125	Little Ringed Plover		Y	Y
126	Little Stint			Y
127	Little Swift	Y	Y	
128	Little Tern		Y	
129	Long-billed Pipit		Y	
130	Long-tailed Shrike	Y	Y	Y
131	Marbled Teal (Marbled Duck)		Y	
132	Marsh Sandpiper	Y	Y	Y
133	Montagu's Harrier	Y	Y	
134	Northern Shoveler		Y	Y
135	Old world quail sp.	Y	Y	
136	Oriental Darter	Y	Y	Y
137	Oriental Honey-buzzard		Y	
138	Osprey			Y
139	Paddyfield Pipit	Y	Y	
140	Painted Sandgrouse		Y	
141	Painted Stork	Y	Y	Y
142	Pallid Harrier	Y	Y	
143	Pied Avocet	Y	Y	Y
144	Pied Bushchat	Y	Y	
145	Pied Cuckoo (Jacobin Cuckoo)	Y	Y	
146	Pied Kingfisher	Y	Y	Y
147	Pipit sp.		Y	
148	Plain Prinia	Y	Y	
149	Plover sp.		Y	
150	Purple Heron	Y	Y	

Sl No	Species	Location		
		Nalsarovar	Great Rann of Kutch	Jamnagar
151	Purple Sunbird		Y	Y
152	Purple-rumped Sunbird	Y		
153	Red Collared Dove		Y	Y
154	Red-backed Shrike	Y	Y	
155	Red-headed Bunting		Y	
156	Red-naped Ibis	Y	Y	Y
157	Red-necked Phalarope			Y
158	Red-rumped Swallow		Y	Y
159	Red-tailed Shrike		Y	
160	Red-tailed Wheatear (Persian Wheatear)		Y	
161	Red-vented Bulbul	Y	Y	Y
162	Red-wattled Lapwing	Y	Y	Y
163	River Tern	Y	Y	Y
164	Rock Pigeon (Feral)	Y	Y	Y
165	Rose-ringed Parakeet	Y	Y	Y
166	Rosy Starling	Y	Y	Y
167	Ruddy Turnstone			Y
168	Ruff	Y	Y	Y
169	Rufous Treepie	Y		
170	Rufous-fronted Prinia	Y	Y	
171	Rufous-tailed Lark		Y	
172	Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin		Y	
173	Sand Lark			Y
174	Sarus Crane	Y		
175	Savanna Nightjar			
176	Scaly-breasted Munia	Y	Y	
177	Shikra	Y	Y	Y
178	Shorebird sp.			Y
179	Short-toed Snake Eagle		Y	
180	Shrike sp.		Y	Y
181	Siberian Stonechat (Common Stonechat)	Y	Y	
182	Singing/Indian Bushlark	Y		
183	Slender-billed Gull		Y	Y
184	Small Minivet	Y	Y	
185	Spotted Flycatcher		Y	
186	Spotted Owlet	Y		
187	Steppe Eagle		Y	
188	Streaked Weaver		Y	
189	Streaked/Black-breasted Weaver	Y		
190	Striolated Bunting (House Bunting)		Y	
191	Sykes's Warbler		Y	Y
192	Terek Sandpiper			Y
193	Tern sp.		Y	
194	Tree Pipit	Y		
195	Tricolored Munia (Black-headed Munia)	Y		
196	Variable Wheatear		Y	
197	Western Reef Heron (Western Reef Egret)		Y	Y
198	Western Yellow Wagtail			Y
199	Whimbrel			Y
200	Whiskered Tern	Y	Y	Y

Sl No	Species	Location		
		Nalsarovar	Great Rann of Kutch	Jamnagar
201	White Stork	Y		
202	White-bellied Minivet		Y	
203	White-breasted Waterhen	Y		Y
204	White-browed Wagtail	Y		
205	White-eared Bulbul	Y	Y	Y
206	White-eyed Buzzard	Y		Y
207	White-tailed Iora (Marshall's Iora)		Y	
208	White-throated Kingfisher	Y	Y	Y
209	Wire-tailed Swallow	Y		Y
210	Wood Sandpiper	Y	Y	Y
211	Woolly-necked Stork	Y		
212	Yellow-eyed Babbler		Y	
213	Yellow-throated Sparrow (Chestnut-shouldered Petronia)	Y	Y	
214	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	Y		Y
215	Zitting Cisticola	Y		

***

Cover photo credit: Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, by Umesh Mani

For Private Circulation Only
Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani **Email:** bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Deccan Birders, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **Website:** www.deccanbirders.in. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/deccanbirders. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*